

Faiz Ahmed Faiz's Salvific Ethics and the Uneven World

By Shabir Hussain Ganaie

gul hui jati hai afsurdah sulagti hui sham
dhul ke nikle gi abhi chasma-e mahtab se rat
aur ... mushtaq nigahun ki suni jayaigi
aur ... un ke hathoon se mas hoongai yeh
tarsai huvai haath

.....

Yeh hasin khet phata padta hai joban jin ka
Kis liyai in mein faqat bhook uga karti hai
Yeh har ik simt pur asrar kadi divarein
Jal bujhe jin mein hazaroon ki javani ke charag
Yeh har ik gam pe in khwaboos ki maqtal gahein
Jin ke partau se charagan hain hazaroon ke damagh

.....

Yeh bhi hain aisai kayi aur bhi mazmoon hoongai
Laikin us shokh kai aahista sai khultai huvai hoant
Haa-e us jism ke kambakht dilaavez khutoot
Aap hi kahiye kahin aisai bhi afsoon hoongai

Apna mauzoo-e –sukhan in ke siva kuch aur nahi

Tab-e – shayir ka vatan in kai siva aur nahi i (best of faiz..p..39-41)

(This evening. Forlorn – its embers smouldering,
Out of the moon’s spring will emerge night, cleansed –
And my eager eyes will be rewarded
As my impatient hands touch yours.

.....

These luscious corn-fields bursting with youth –
Why do they yield hunger alone?
These impregnable, mysterious walls all around –
Within which
Were snuffed out the lamps of countless young,
Hearts.
At every step, these abattoirs of dreams
Whose reflections have ignited the minds of multitudes.
All these themes are there indeed – and many more;
But the gently parting lips of that beauty –
And oh, the alluring contours of her body –
Now tell me yourself, could there be such witchery elsewhere?
Well, for me this is it –

A poet’s mental province can be none other than this.) (Kumar 40- 42)

I have started this paper by quoting a few lines from the poem Mauzoo-e-sukhan. This is the poem where Faiz in his favorite way uses the love of his beloved to highlight the pain and misery of people around him. Seemingly it is romantic love which emerges as a dominant theme in this poem but this poem with its enchanting music and rhythm draws our attention to the hunger, social injustice,

oppression and the extreme sufferings of the common people. Faiz's ethics as they emerge in this poem are secular in nature. Love of his beloved helps him to cope with the uneven world but this does not mean escape from the reality. It induces a mood of contemplation in him, as he thinks about his country's emancipation from slavery (of different sorts).

Faiz was a secular saint concerned with the salvation of masses here and now. He thought that it is useless to separate oneself from the world of day to day affairs because it is this world which colors our dreams and aspirations. He was a citizen of the world and his poetry is very much embedded in the labors of the world here and now. He believed that the self of a human being is a tiny speck. It gets meaning as it relates itself with the myriads of selves inhabiting this vast universe. Though he had close association with several saints of his time and was a confirmed follower of Sufism, he had no beliefs and doctrines except the one that proclaims the coming age in which the disempowered/underprivileged and the oppressed class can live in peace and prosperity. He had progressive social and political beliefs and he gave voice to the voiceless in his poetry. In his poems he goes deep into the conscience of the suffering masses and lets his personal sorrow drink deep in the world sorrow. His poetry reflects his intellectual antipathy and battle against an unjust and outmoded social order and he discards it on logical grounds as anti-human; however his rebellion is sans bitterness. He symbolized the collective human struggle against the oppression and abhorred the injustice of all kinds as practiced by man upon man. His poetry expresses the desires, anguish, pain and suffering of humanity at a universal level. It also articulates his unrelenting determination to create a better and just society. He had a deep understanding of human existence in its entirety and wholeness. Faiz believed in the ethics of love, brotherhood, humanity, peace and mutual understanding. The fact is that Faiz sought to transform individuals and societies on the basis of love and affection. He symbolized all that is humane, noble, gracious, daring and challenging and he strove hard for the noble cause of making the world a better place to live. In the words of Shiv k Kumar,

“An irrepressible rebel, Faiz never submitted himself to any form of tyranny – political, social or religious. As a poet thinker, he believed that art should never be divorced from social reality.”ⁱⁱⁱ

He was deeply concerned about the health of his society in particular and for the whole humanity in general. He was the emissary of the soul and the feelings of people. For him salvation was in rebellion against the unjust order and he adopted the cause of masses as a poet of revolution. But his voice was distinct from other revolutionary voices. According to Khalid Hassan,

“ Faiz was a Marxist, but what differentiated him from this often joyless and doctrinaire crowd was his profound humanism, steeped as it was in the rich tradition of the subcontinent’s culture, literature and spiritual continuum. His poetry is a celebration of life and an affirmation of the law of change. He was man singularly devoid of prejudice. He fought bigotry, not with bigotry, but with tolerance.”ⁱⁱⁱ

In his poetry the concept of love and Revolution are merged together in one unity. But at the same time he believes love is not the salvation till the gap between have’s and have not’s is not bridged and the discrimination on the basis of wealth and class is not abolished. “Muj sae pahli se mohbat mere mehboob na mang” underscores the point that life can’t be lived on the manna of transcendence provided by love. Life is a struggle, a power game where unless you keep watch you will be preyed upon by all kinds of vultures. There are other pains than the pain of love.

Anginat sadyon ke tarik bahimana tilsm

Resham-o-atlas-o-kimkhwab mein bunvayei huvai

Ja baja bikate huvai koocha o bazar mein jism

Khak mein lithdai huvai khoon mein naihlaiyei huvai

Jism nikle huvai amraz ke tannooron se

Peep baihti huvi galtai huvai nasoaron se

Laut jati hai udhar ko bhi nazar kya kijey

Ab bhi dilkash hai tera husn magar kya kijey

Aur bhi dukh hain zamane mein mohabat ke siva

Rahatein aur bhi hain vasl ki rahat ke siva^{iv}

(If there are spells of those dark, savage, countless centuries –

Bodies robed in silk, satin and velvet –

Then aren’t there also bdies

Traded down streets and alleyways –

Bodies smeared in dust, bathed in blood
Bodies emerging from ovens of sickness
Bodies with the pus oozing from chronic sores?
If these images also seize my eye
Even though your beauty still enthralls.
It's because there are sorrows other than heartache,
Joys other than love's rapture
Sp ask me not for that old fervour, my love.) (Kumar 22)

The world must be made safe for love; until then the salvation lies in keeping head high in the world that demands none shall hold his head high and asks for the servility, submission and surrender of human freedom to keep the capitalists and feudal lords in comfort. He craved for the transformation of modern individual's psyche as he saw him wallowing in the mire of materialistic comforts. Faiz wishes that modern man realize the power of love and fellow feeling. He is involved with the experience of the human soul in the long and strenuous voyage of revolutionary struggle. Faiz saw and felt the pain of common people who were virtually living the life of dogs.

Yeh galyoon ke aavarah bekar kutai
Ki bakhsha gaya jin ko zauq-e-gadai
.....
Jahaan bhar ki dhutkar in ki kamayi
Na aaraam shab ko na rahat savaire
.....
Yeh har aik ki thokarein khanai walai
Yeh faaqoon se ukta kai marjanei walai^v
(Tramping about the streets aimlessly, these dogs,
Born to the prerogative of beggary –

Their only treasure is the world's scorn

.....

Their only wages, the world's reproof.

Not a moment's respite, day or night –

.....

They who suffer everybody's kicks,

Who'd tire and die of starvation. (kumar 36)

Capitalists threw a few crumbs of bread in order to let them survive so that they guard them (the way people in arms secure lives of ruling elite at the cost of their life, their family life, their dignity, their creative pursuits), feed them (the way farmers who despite being the real producers work for the rulers who are only parasites) and do other works for them. Faiz while working as an army officer met money lenders and land lords and saw how corrupt and rapacious a man can be. Faiz was witness to the bloodshed that followed partition. He saw human bestiality as man saw no sin in killing his own brethren. These episodes reinforced his belief that justice and love were the only remedy for making humankind live amicably and peacefully. Faiz highlights the agony of mankind and raises his voice in opposition to oppressive forces but he does it by playing the sweet melody of love. There is no hatred in his revolt. He does not hate the oppressor. He hates the oppression. He fights evil by his moral courage. His message of love and justice has a universal appeal. It transcends the boundaries of culture and nationhood as it is available to all regardless of religion, race and color. His revolution is sans violence. It has no bloodshed accompanying it. In the uneven world salvation is tied to removal of structural injustice. A hungry man has nothing to do with transcendence. He can't afford love and creative pursuits. In Zindan (prison) it is absurd to talk of heaven. The workers - you n me - must break the prison constituted by the walls of classes and ideologies in order to breathe in free air. In a world where loneliness and prostitution of body and soul crushes human personality there can be no scope for the perfection of ego that mystics or the poets like Allama Iqbal see as the meaning of salvation. But what is the alternative vision with the help of which to counter the uneven world? For him it is truth which can save us from the corrupt world. Truth can never die.

Humanity will prevail when truth gets its just place in the minds and actions of people.

Boal ki lab azaad hain terai

Boal,zaban ab tak teri hai

Tera sutvan jism hai tera

Boal ki jaan ab tak teri hai

.....

Boal, yeh thoada waqt bohat hai

Jism-o-zabaan ki maut se paihle

Boal, ki sach zinda hai ab tak

Boal,jo kuch kehna hai keh lai ^{vi}

(Speak up, for your lips are not sealed

And your words are still your own.

This upright body is yours –

Speak, while your soul is still your own.

.....

Speak up now, for time's running out.

Before your body and mind fade away,

Tell us, for truth is not yet dead.

Speak

Whatever you have to say! (Kumar 38)

These verses express Faiz's belief that we can overcome all the hurdles and that salvation constituted by life of creativity, love and freedom is possible and even on the cards. He is determined to hold his head high. Of course the fate or

historical forces may be stronger than the passion of the individual but in the words of Faiz:

Ham daikhain gai

Laazim hai ki ham bhi daikhain gai

.....

Jab zulm-o- sitam kai koh-e-giraan

Rooyi ki tarah ud jayein gai

.....

Ham ahle safa, mardoode haram

Masnand pe bithayei jayein gai

Sab taaj uchaalai jayein gai

Sab takht girayein jayein gai

.....

Aur raaj karai gi khalq-e -khuda

Ham deikhain gai

Laazim hai ki ham bhi deikhain gai ..^{vii}

(we shall live to see,

So it is writ,

We shall live to see,

.....

The day when the mountains of oppression.

Will blow away like wisps of cotton;

.....

We, the rejects of the earth,

Will be raised to a place of honour,

All crowns'll be tossed in the air,

All thrones'll be smashed,

.....

We, the people will rule the earth

We shall live to see,

So it is writ,

We shall live to see. (City 230-233)

These verses show imminent kingdom of heaven in the imagination of Faiz.

Faiz feels the life giving wind that fills buds with color and sings:

Guloon mein rang bhare bad-e naubahaar chale

Chale bhi aavo ke gulshan ka karobaar chale.

Faiz has no eschatological vision in the conventional sense but if heaven has to be won here and now as mystics assert, it consists in life of unconditional love, unbounded freedom and joy of creativity and it has to be realized in the world of space and time by action. No otherworldly salvation is possible as long as people continue to suffer in the external chains of slavery, hunger and oppression and the internal chains of desire and lust and continue to live in their own cocoons. For Faiz salvation has to be collective, unlike the concept of Mahayana Buddhism which demands postponing of salvation by arhant until the whole world conquers suffering. For him struggle must go on, the effort is salvation. Keeping hope is salvation.

Nahi wisal mumkin to aarzoo hi sahi

Namaze shoq tou wajib hai bewazoo hi sahi.....

Faiz has firm belief in the coming age of peace and prosperity, an age where there will be no scope for oppression. It will bring an end to the misery and despair of people.

chand roaz aur meri jaan faqat chand hi roaz

Zulm ki chaoon mein dam lainai pe majboor hain ham

.....
Laikin ab zulm ki miaad ke din thoadei hain

Ik zara sabr ki faryaad ke din thoada hain

.....
Arsa-e-daihr ki jhulsi huvi virani mein

Ham ko rahna hai, pa yoonhi tou nahin rahna hai

Ajnabi haathoon ka benaaam giranbaar sitam

Aaj saihna hai hamesha tou nahi sehna hai^{viii}

(A few days more, my love, just a few days –

Are we fated to live in tyranny's shadow.

.....
But now the days of tyranny are numbered.

Just a little patience,

Since the days of entreaty are nearly done.

.....
In the scorched wasteland of life,

We're destined to live, but not like this.

This nameless, heavy oppression of alien hands,

We may have to endure today, but not forever. (kumar 34)

ⁱ Shiv K Kumar, trans; *The Best of Faiz* (New Dehli:UBSPD,2001),p. 39-41.

ⁱⁱShiv k Kumar, Preface to *The Best of Faiz*. p. viii.

ⁱⁱⁱ Daud Kamal and Khalid Hassan, trans. ed. *O City of Lights: Faiz Ahmed Faiz* (Oxford: Oxford university press,2006) , p. 4.

^{iv} *The Best of Faiz*. P.21.

^v Ibid. , p. 35.

^{vi} Ibid. , p. 37

^{vii} *O City of Lights*. P. 231-233.

^{viii} Best of Faiz. P. 33